

SERMON II.*

2 Cor. 4. 8.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.

I SHALL detain you very little about the context. In the foregoing verse the apostle speaks of a certain treasure which was committed to earthen vessels, with this design, that the excellency of the power might be of God; that is, might appear to be of God, and not of men. What this treasure was you may collect from the 6th verse. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Now "this treasure," saith he, "we have in earthen vessels;" that is, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ: conveyed in and through a Mediator, and discovered in the gospel. It is a treasure of light whereof he speaks, a treasure of glorious light. And this is that, which he said was put into earthen vessels; intrusted to the ministerial disposition of very mean, and

* Preached at Haberdasher's Hall, February 27, 1675.

very weak and fragile instruments. And that upon this account, that all might see that the excellency of the power was of God, and not of them; that there was somewhat more than human in the matter, that such effects, as he had spoken of in the close of the foregoing chapter, should follow that dispensation they were intrusted with. Where also it is by the way intimated, that this same treasure is not a treasure of mere light; feeble, ineffectual notions, that were apt only to reach the mind of a man, and stay there as the matter of contemplation only; but it is a certain vital, vigorous light whereof he speaks, a light that carries power, efficacy, and a transforming influence along with it. The light of that glory which being beheld, changeth souls into the same likeness, from glory to glory. This light we have, this treasure of glorious light, in earthen vessels; that so the excellency of that power, which accompanieth this light, may appear to be of God and not of men: that all who observe it may be convinced, and constrained to confess something divine in it, when such things are discovered and held forth to men, as work at the rate, which the Gospel dispensation was designed to do, and did actually do.

And then in the words that we are to speak unto, and those that follow, he giveth a proof and demonstration of the excellency of the power, that did accompany and go with the Gospel light wherever it reached its end, and did the work to which it was designed; and to which it was also in its own nature adapted, and made suitable. Let this be a proof to you (as if he had said) that there is a certain excellency of power accompanying that light, which we are appointed to convey to the world; namely, that we, who are thus intrusted, though we are but a company of earthen vessels, are not for all that presently knocked asunder by being on every side struck at, and dashed against. "We are indeed troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Certainly there was somewhat more than ordinary in this matter, that a little light should so preserve vessels of earth, that they could not be broken. There was an excellency of power went along with it. And this is brought for a proof of it, that their spirits were sustained and upheld in defiance of surrounding troubles. Our spirits are not broken, we are still where we were, whatever assaults are made upon us from without. This is that which the apostle says here, and is manifestly the design and scope of the words.

And in these and the following words we have the apostle very curiously criticising about the degree of the afflictions,

which he, and others in his circumstances were exposed to, or the extent and limits of them; that they reached so far, to a certain point or degree, but no further. And he makes, as you see, a fourfold distinction between trouble on every side, and distress; perplexity, and despair; persecution, and desertion; dejection, and destruction: yielding the former as to each of these, but denying the latter.

And as to the passage which we have chosen to speak unto, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed:" we are to consider the subject, that is common to this, and all the rest; and then what is said about it by way of affirmation, and by way of negation.

It is very true, this apostle doth more directly speak here of a particular subject; that is, of such persons as were intrusted with the ministry and dispensation of the gospel: "WE have this treasure in earthen vessels, WE are troubled on every side," &c. But yet the same persons were considerable too in a capacity, that was common to them with all other christians. And he speaks in that guise before, of something that must be understood as common to christians in general; and not appropriated to ministers only: and that is, the having the light to shine into their hearts; that "light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." This was not peculiar unto them alone. It having shone first into the minds and hearts of the apostles; from thence, as its instrument, this light was further conveyed, and transmitted unto others. We take "we" therefore in that more exclusive sense, or as it holds forth to us a larger subject; namely, christians as such, who are so in sincerity and truth; and I would observe to you,

That it is very possible to be encompassed with surrounding troubles, and yet at the same time not to be in distress. Or, if we take it with application to the subject; sincere christians, even then, when they are surrounded with troubles on every side, may yet be exempted from distress: may be troubled on every side, yet not distressed. And that this may be more distinctly spoken to, we are to consider,

- I. Of whom this is said.
- II. What it is that is said of them.
- III. Upon what grounds.
- IV. Make some use of the whole.

I. We are to consider of whom this is said. I have already in general told you, that we may justly extend it to all christians that are sincere; that is, who are entirely such, and who faithfully persevere.

1. To those, who are entirely such, or are christians throughout : who do not content themselves with this, or that piece of religion : but have gotten the whole and entire frame of it. It is very possible, that the whole of religion may not, by these troubles on every side, be struck at all at once. But if a man be an entire christian, by the concurrence of all the integral parts which belong to such a character, it is likely that he will some time or other find himself troubled on every side ; and yet may find himself also exempted from distress. The apostle tells us, that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3. 12. It was possible to be a sober man, and a pious man (as piety went in the pagan world) and yet not be persecuted. But if a man would be a godly man in Jesus Christ ; if he would add Christianity, in that state of things, and at that time, to his profession of piety ; then, as if the apostle had said, let him look to it, he will be persecuted ; and then he had need to look to this also, that he be not distressed.

2. The true christian of whom we speak is also one that faithfully perseveres. Having been once an entire christian; by the concurrence of all that was requisite to make him so, he continues to be what once he was. Otherwise, by laying aside this or that piece of religion, when that comes to expose him to danger, the case would be altered. He neither would be exposed to affliction, nor so much need the support. If I did preach circumcision, says the apostle, when the doing of that was so great a salvo to a man, why should I then suffer persecution ? I should then be liable to no trouble, the offence of the cross being ceased. Gal. 5. 11. "It were" (as if he had said) "an easy matter for me to avoid the stroke, if I could wave such a particular piece of Christian truth, and such a part of Christian duty ; as this very juncture of time did challenge my owning and asserting even to the utmost hazard: I were well enough if I could dispense in this matter : but because I cannot, the offence of the cross is not likely to cease ; I shall have that in my way if I were apt to stumble at it."

II. We are next to consider what it is that is here said of these persons. Something is said affirmatively, to shew the extent of the present affliction ; and something negatively, to shew the limitation of it.

1. That which is said by way of affirmation, and to shew how far the present affliction did extend is this ; "We are troubled on every side." It reached so far as to give trouble on every side. Here we are to consider what sort of trouble

that is, in respect of the nature of it; then in respect of the degree of it.

(1.) In respect of the nature of it, it is plain it was external trouble. The very word there used, *θλιβομενοι*, signifieth dashing a thing from without. As the beating and allision of the waves against a rock make no trouble in the rock, no commotion there; but a great deal of noise, clamour, and tumult round about it. That is the sort of trouble which that word, in its primary signification holds forth to us; and which the circumstances of the text declare to be the signification of the thing here meant. And then we have next to consider,

(2.) The degree of this same trouble; or what is intimated concerning it in the expression "on every side." It is very true indeed we are not necessitated, by the literal import of the expression, (*παστι*) there used, to read it thus. We may as well read it, troubled in all things, troubled in all kinds, or at all times. The universal expression is capable of any of these additions, whereof there is none expressed in the text. It may therefore mean a great variety of those external troubles that we are liable to; such as we find the apostle making a distinct enumeration of pretty frequently; as in the 2 Cor. 11. 22. and onward, and so elsewhere. And also the expression may import the continuedness of such troubles running along with us in our course. We are always troubled, surrounded with trouble, always filled with it. "In every city, bonds and afflictions abide me," says St. Paul. This is said by way of affirmation, to shew the extent of this affliction. And then,

2. By way of negation, to shew the limitations of this affliction, it is said that it did not arrive to distress. That is the thing denied of this subject. While trouble on every side is confessed, the apostle, I say, denies their being actually distressed on this account. And there the word used (*σενωχωρουμενοι*) signifieth such a kind of straitening as doth infer a difficulty of drawing breath; that a man is so compressed that he cannot tell how to breathe: that is the native import of the word. As if he had said, We are not reduced to that extremity, by all the troubles that surround us; but we can breathe well enough for all that. Properly there are meant, by this thing denied, two degrees or steps of inward trouble. As

(1.) That it is trouble that doth not reach the heart. For that is a distressing trouble which does so, which cuts and wounds the heart. But it does not touch there, as is the import of that expression in the 32 Psalm, "In the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." Psal. 32, 6. That is strange that floods of waters should not come nigh un-

to him, when he is in the midst of them. No, they do not so invade his spirit as to affect that; they do not afflict his heart. And

(2.) Here is denied (supposing such afflictions do reach the heart) that they so overwhelm as to constrain them to acknowledge, that they are distressed. If the waters should so flow in upon a man's soul that he could not breathe, that were a distress indeed. But the matter is not so. Either it is a trouble that reacheth not the heart; or if it doth, it does not oppress or overwhelm it. But now,

III. We are to inquire concerning the grounds of this affirmation and negation; or how it comes to pass that such are troubled on every side, and yet not distressed.

1. Let us inquire how it comes to pass, that true, sincere christians are troubled on every side; to keep to the expression in our translation. It is to be observed, that besides the permissive and disposing providence of the great Ruler of the church and the world, who for wise and holy ends permits, and orders such a state of things sometimes; besides this, I say, there are those proper inclinations in the persons immediately concerned, which directly reach the case. That is, there is somewhat in the disposition or temper of those, who are agents in this matter, or immediately work this surrounding trouble; and also in the patients, by which they are exposed, or do expose themselves to trouble on every side.

As to the former, there needs no other account be given of it, but only the hate, the malignity of a wicked heart; that will be as mischievous to any more visible appearances of God, and his interest, as is possible. Therefore wicked men will create trouble on every side, because they are so wickedly bent.

But then on the part of the patients, or suffering christians, why are they so exposed? or why do they expose themselves, since the trouble that is on every side, upon the account of religion, might be avoided? To this we answer, that as the reason why others will create this trouble is from the corrupt malignity of their natures, so the reason why these do expose themselves to such trouble is from that new nature, that holy gracious nature, which is put into them, and superadded to what they naturally were before. We are to consider their religion as a thing, which is vitally united with them; that is, as it were, incorporated, and wrought into them, so as to make another sort of person in them from what there was before. For what a difference is there between the religion of one, who is not thorough, and in good earnest, in the business of Christianity,

and one who is a christian indeed ! To the former sort, religion is but as a sort of cloak. A man can easily lay aside his cloak if he finds it inconvenient, or a burden to him. It has no living union with himself ; therefore it puts him to no pain or trouble at all to throw it away, if he finds thereby any inconvenience. But the religion of one that is truly and sincerely a christian, is a vital thing, and part of himself. And though a man can easily part with his cloak, yet he cannot so easily part with his skin. That has a vital union with himself to which the spirit of life gives an animating power. And this is the case here. One that is only an overly outside professor hath put on a cloak of Christianity. If he finds that any prejudice is like to accrue to him upon this account, it is, I say, the easiest thing in the world for him to throw off his cloak. But one, who is a christian indeed, cannot do so. He cannot part with his religion. It is not as a cloak to him, but it is a piece of himself, and therefore he must be exposed. What will directly strike at such a man as he is, cannot be helped ; for he cannot cease to be what he is. It is his very nature : that is, a new nature is put into him, which he cannot alter, or change and vary as he will ; and therefore he must take what comes. But then again,

2. We are to consider the ground of the negation ; why such, though troubled on every side, are not distressed. And they are not so, partly upon the account of that gracious presence that is afforded to them ; and partly because of those principles which are in them, that necessarily carry matter of solace and relief, so as to keep them from distress, notwithstanding their being surrounded with external troubles. There is, I say,

(1.) A gracious presence afforded upon promise. " When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isa. 43. 2. This is promised and made good, more or less, in a higher or lower degree, as to the divine wisdom and goodness seems most meet. He will never leave nor forsake such, whose hearts he hath determined to himself, and who adhere and cleave to him. He will not cast away the upright man. Such a one then is not like to be in distress when he hath God so present to him. It is but turning himself to him, and he hath him at hand. And,

(2.) In subordination to the former, the very native tendency of the principles, which God has implanted in a holy soul, and which incline and dispose it towards him, are its great relief against every thing that tends to distress, or works that way.

As for instance ; faith, which adjoins the soul to God, interests it in his infinite fulness ; when the soul must be far remote from straits or distress. Love too, is another principle by which the soul comes to have the actual fruition of that fulness, according to its measure ; and what God doth now see meet, or fit, and suitable for it. There is patience also, by which the soul is composed ; and brought into a perfect mastery and dominion over itself, so far as this gracious principle obtains. "By your patience possess ye your souls." You are outed of yourselves, if you be not patient ; but if you be patient you enjoy yourselves. So that let the storm be never so great and boisterous without, there will be peace and calmness within. Patience is an ability to suffer. It is passive fortitude. He that can suffer, who is furnished with this ability, is in peace and quiet ; is in no distress. He considers the case thus : "Such and such can afflict, and I can suffer ; I am therefore in this respect on even terms with all the world. They can indeed lay upon me such and such things, and I can bear them through grace that helps me." If such be the temper of a christian that he cannot suffer, he must be a slave. Every such person must be subject to the power of those that can hurt him, or do him an ill turn ; only because he can suffer nothing. He cannot suffer, therefore he must serve ; or yield to every one's beck that hath any power to hurt him. But he that can suffer, hath the mastery over himself, and remains in self-possession. The other is outed of himself ; and must resign his will, his judgment, his conscience, and every thing to the pleasure of another. Again, the principle of a good conscience also keeps a person from distress. When a man's own heart doth not reproach him, what can be distressing unto him ? As Job said his should never do so, though he suffered, you know, very hard and grievous things. "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live, till I die I will not remove my integrity from me." Job 27. 5, 6. Where such a disposition of spirit remains there can be no distress ; no distress can ever fall there.

IV. And now to make some brief use of this subject, we learn,

1. How happy a good man is when no external trouble though it compass him on every side, is yet able to bring him into distress. Is not this man a happy man that can defy the world ? that can stand in the face of storms unhurt, untouched, unshaken ? The matter deserves our serious thoughts, that there should be such a privilege as this communicated unto mortality ; unto a poor creature dwelling in mortal flesh. It gives us to see, that there is somewhat that greatens the spirit of such a

one to that degree, as to make it too big for all this world. For what else is the reason, why such a one cannot be distressed? only because things apt to distress in their own nature, and in a subject more liable to it, are not able to compass, and entirely comprehend within themselves that spirit, which they would aim to distress. The spirit of a good man, as such, is too big for all this world; and if it have that grace in exercise, that is suitable to such a case, it is too big for this world entirely to compass. You cannot compress and straiten that which you cannot grasp. This world cannot grasp such a spirit. It is, I say, too big to be held within this narrow sphere. It looks above all sensible things. It is of too great a prospect to be confined in its apprehension of things, to time; it looks into a vast and boundless eternity. Therefore such a person cannot be distressed in his spirit. It surmounts the world, and is too great to be straitened by all the powers thereof, which can never reach unto it. Or if it should be brought into some very great trouble, it looks beyond this present troublous state of things. It looks into eternity, and says; "If it be not well now, it shall be. Things at present are not as I could wish, but they shall be as well as ever I could wish hereafter." In short you cannot confine the eye of such a one, but it will have a look at something beyond what is present and liable to common view. Therefore there is no way entirely to cut off relief from the spirit of a good man; for though it be troubled on every side, it is yet exempt from distress.

2. Hence we see also the vast difference that there is between such a one, and a wicked, carnal man that knows not God; who is unacquainted with, and unrelated to him. Such persons, when external trouble comes upon them, are presently distressed, or are very liable to be so upon every occasion. They have not the way of escaping the pressure thereof, that holy gracious persons have. A person is not distressed so long as he hath some way of escape or other left. This is intimated by St. Paul himself, when he says; "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. 10. 13. It is no strange thing that an affliction or trial should be borne, when there is a way of escape.

But it may be said, Why is there any talk of bearing what I shall escape? I answer, it is plain that it is not escaping to suffer, that is there meant? but real hurt or damage by that suffering, so as to be not at all the worse for it, or prejudiced by it, at

least in our spiritual concerns. It is such an escape as that, which our Saviour means in these words: "Watch and pray always, that ye may be counted worthy to escape the things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21. 36. Not that they should escape suffering for he had been telling them before, what grievous things they should have to suffer; but that they should receive no hurt from their sufferings: that is, upon the whole matter they should have no cause to reckon themselves sufferers, inasmuch as no damage should accrue to them from thence.

Now when a man hath a way of escape, he is not distressed; his state, I say, is not to be called a real distress. There is, at least upward, always a way of escape. David was sore distressed in Ziklag, after the Amalekites had invaded, and burnt it with fire and taken his people captive; yet it is said, that "he encouraged himself in his God." 1 Sam. 30. 6. He looked upward, and had a way of escape or deliverance open to him from above.

But it is however said there, that he "was greatly distressed." I answer it is very true, and so any good man may be in a great degree distressed, as well as David. Thus the apostle Paul speaking of the impossibility of working any separation between him and Christ, and intimating that nothing could force him out of the arms of his love; not even persecution, or tribulation, nor famine nor the sword; mentions distress also as the supposed lot of good men. Rom. 8. 35. But we must understand however only by this, that something may befall a good man which is apt to distress; but is not actually distressing, at least to that degree as to allow no way of escape. Then indeed a man would be in real distress, if that were true of him, which his enemies said of David; "Many there be which say of my soul, there is no help for him in God." Psalm 3. 2. But this is not the case; there is no state in which a good man may be, wherein there remains no help for him in God.

It was indeed a distressing case, which you find Saul was in, when he had caused Samuel, or somewhat that appeared like to him, to be called up; who said unto him, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" To whom Saul answered, I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more. 1 Sam. 28. 15. This was a grievous distress indeed: there was great trouble from without, and God was gone. Here then is the vastly different state of a wicked wretch, from that of a godly man under affliction in a time of trouble, and when distress is on every side; God is gone! God is afar off! Besides such a

one has no disposition to take the way that leads to God. Thus Elihu speaking of such distressed wicked men, says; "By reason of the multitude of oppressions they cry; they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" Job 35. 9. 10. They lie groveling, and groaning, ready to expire away under their burden; but it never comes into their mind, to inquire after God, saying, Where is our God? This is a thing unthought of, and therefore theirs is a most distressed state and condition; having no shift left them, nor knowing what to do. But there is always this shift left to a pious soul, if there be nothing else, namely, to look up. "We know not what to do," says Jehoshaphat, "but our eyes are up to thee." 2 Chron. 20. 12. But when a man hath simply nothing to do, no prospect of relief, then the case is very forlorn; and this, at length, will be the case of all wicked men. We may easily guess, that they have nothing left to do, who cry to rocks and mountains to fall upon them. This speaks plain desperateness; and yet this will be the case one day with those, who find not out in due season, the way of being exempted from distress. Then there will be a great deal of trouble on every side, when the world will be all in flames; and then it must certainly be distress. There will be, as our Lord informs us, (Luke 21. 25, &c.) distress of nations with perplexity; the seas and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming upon the earth: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, when we shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory; and when the cry shall go forth, "Lo! he is come, behold his sign in the heavens!" Consider then how we are concerned to make sure of his favour, and to hasten to get into that state; wherein, though for a while we may not be exempted from trouble, yet we shall from distress: I mean from that distress for which there is no remedy, which can admit of no relief.

I thought to have propounded something by way of counsel, in order to such a course as this. As,

(1.) Labour to be disengaged from all terrene things, the things of this world. If there our life is bound up, if we are troubled there on every side, we cannot but be distressed. But if the world be crucified to us, and we to the world, there can be no distress; the troubles of it cannot be distressing to us. Dead things cannot feel, cannot afflict one another. Let us say then, "The world is dead to me, and I am dead to it; we are crucified one to another." The dead can lie quietly one by another, without giving mutual wounds. And then too,

(2.) Draw nigh to God, that large and boundless good, in whom all fulness is. Of them that fear him it is said, "their souls shall dwell at ease." Ps. 25. 13. The expression in the original, is, "Their souls shall lodge, or rest in goodness;" for the word there aptly signifies the quiet rest of the night. We must then draw nigh to God; and stick close to him in trust, confidence, love, obedience, subjection, and by a continual daily course of prayer. For they who are given much to pray will feel little of distress, in comparison of what they are else liable to. The Psalmist speaks of enemies, who were continually designing evil to him. "For my love," says he, they are mine adversaries, but I give myself unto prayer." Ps. 109. 4. If there be any design against me, if my enemies are aiming at me, "I pray;" for so the expression is in the Hebrew text: that is, I betake myself to prayer, my known and usual resort, and then I fare well. Thus, in so doing, you will find your soul to dwell at ease, and rest in the goodness of God. A wicked man, in the midst of his sufficiency is full of straits; you, in the midst of straits will be in the fountain of all-sufficiency, and have the all-flowing goodness streaming on every side. And in such a course you may come to experience what is here said by the apostle, so as no longer to look upon this as a paradox, but as that which your hearts can witness to; namely, that though trouble be on every side, yet thanks be to God, we find no distress.
